

To D.C. 412191

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

CLICK HERE for Multiple Property Listing,  
Historic Resources of the Chicago Park District  
Multiple Property Submission"

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

### 1. Name of Property

historic name Washington Square  
other names/site number Bughouse Square, Park #1244

### 2. Location

street & number 901 N. Clark St. (mailing address)  not for publication  
city, town Chicago  vicinity  
state Illinois code IL county Cook code 031 zip code 60610

### 3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> site	<u>1</u>	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	_____	_____
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>
			Total
			<u>1</u>

Name of related multiple property listing:  
The Historic Resources of the Chicago Park District Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

### 4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.  
William L. Wheeler, SHPO 3-28-91  
Signature of certifying official \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
ILLINOIS HISTORIC PRESERVATION AGENCY  
State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.  
Signature of commenting or other official \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

### 5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:  
 entered in the National Register. \_\_\_\_\_  
 See continuation sheet. \_\_\_\_\_  
 determined eligible for the National Register.  See continuation sheet. \_\_\_\_\_  
 determined not eligible for the National Register. \_\_\_\_\_  
 removed from the National Register. \_\_\_\_\_  
 other, (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Action \_\_\_\_\_

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**6. Function or Use**

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Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

LANDSCAPE/ plaza  

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Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

LANDSCAPE/ plaza  

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**7. Description**

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Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

N/A  

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Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation limestonewalls N/AN/Aroof N/Aother vegetation  

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**Describe present and historic physical appearance.**

Washington Square is a three-acre park located on the near north side of Chicago. It is bounded by Delaware Place on the south, Clark Street on the west, Walton Street on the north, and Dearborn Street on the east. Situated immediately south of the Newberry Library, the park is surrounded by a residential neighborhood. In order to clearly describe Washington Square and show that it retains sufficient integrity to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places, its features have been keyed onto two plans. The first is the earliest plan available and dates from ca. 1920 [A]. The second is a current plot plan [B].

As stated in section F II (continuation sheet 2) of the Multiple Property Documentation Form, "The Historic Resources of the Chicago Park District," the property had few improvements prior to 1869. At that time the city planted a few trees, constructed the diagonal walks which stretch from corner to corner across the site [1], placed a perimeter of limestone coping at the border of the park [2], and erected a simple board fence around the site. After the 1871 fire, the fence was not reconstructed. Within a few years of the fire, benches were placed along the walks, alternating sides at approximately 18-foot intervals.

By 1907, the character-defining features of the park were in place. The stone coping and the diagonal sidewalks remained. However, the alternating benches had been removed, and a single line of continuous cast iron benches with wood slat seats and backs stretched along one side of each walk. At the center of the park, where the two walks would cross, was a large planting bed approximately 60 feet square. Surrounded by a concrete walk, these elements created a small, central plaza [3]. Within the center of the planting bed, was a large fountain [4]. Set in a circular basin approximately 30 feet in diameter was a large shallow bowl supported by one triple column approximately eight feet high. The water spilled from the bowl into the basin below.

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Washington Square

The vegetation in the park consisted of informally planted trees in the triangular quadrants of the park outlined by the sidewalks. At each of the entrances to the park shrubs were planted to create a sense of enclosure as a visitor entered the park. Sporadically massed along the perimeter were other shrubs loosely defining the boundary of the park within the stone coping. Surrounding the central plaza were other shrub massings which enclosed the central plaza creating what appears to have been a quiet, internal space in the park. The trees, which included American, Chinese, and Moline Elms, as well as Poplars, Honey Locust, Maples, and other species in the remainder of the three-acre site, provided a canopy over grassy park.

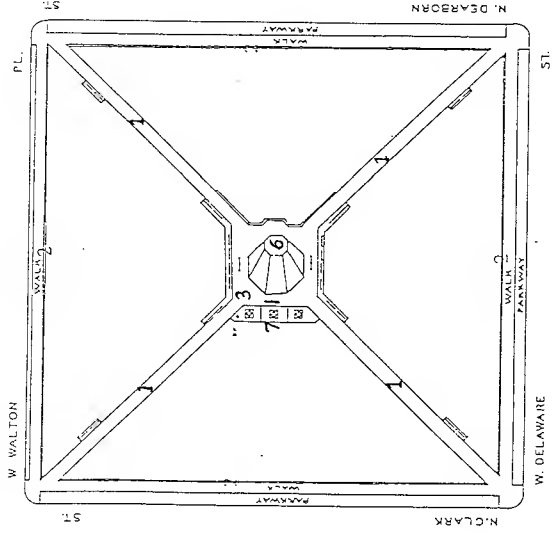
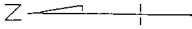
A comfort station was constructed in the park circa 1915 [5]. This addition was immediately to the south of the central square of the park and was approached by two short, curving paths. The entire building was surrounded by masses of shrubs.

In the 1970s several alterations were made to the park. In 1975 the comfort station was removed, and in 1976, the central square was radically changed. The fountain, basin, and planting beds were all removed. A new concrete plaza with a cylindrical speaking platform was installed on the east side [6]. Chess tables [7] and concrete walls and benches were also added around the central plaza. As shrubs died out they were not replaced, and the enclosure of space within the park by plantings has disappeared.

Despite these changes, the stone coping, diagonal walks, tree canopy, and the proportions of the central plaza remain intact. These elements have remained central to the overall sense of place and are an important foundation of Washington Square's continuing integrity. Plans for the restoration of the central plaza with the reinstallation of the fountain and planting beds, as well as the planting of shrubs and the installation of the rows of benches along the walks are currently under consideration and are expected to be realized within 3 years. Restoration will help reinforce the already sufficient integrity of the park's design.



449



PARK NO. 1244  
CORNER NO. 88  
CORNER NO. 10

PLOT PLAN  
WASHINGTON SQUARE PARK  
SCALE: 1" = 30'

CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT

B

WASHINGTON & M. CLARK

CON. BY P. B. SHAW, J. J. TOWN

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally  statewide  locally

Applicable National Register Criteria  A  B  C  D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)  A  B  C  D  E  F  G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Social History  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Period of Significance

1842-1940  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Dates

1855  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Cultural Affiliation

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Person

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_

Architect/Builder

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

Washington Square, the oldest documented extant park in Chicago, meets Criterion A for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Section E of the Multiple Property Documentation Form "The Historic Resources of the Chicago Park District" (continuation sheet, p.2), explains that the property was originally donated to the City in 1842 by James Fitch, Orasmus Bushnell, and Charles Butler of the American Land Company to insure the success of their real estate venture. As this method of land speculation was the way that Chicago's earliest parks were established, Washington Square is a representative example. In addition, throughout its history, the park has played a prominent role in local social life as an important public gathering place. By the 1850s the park was used for political demonstrations, and by the 1910s it had become a favored "soap box" location for the exercise of free speech for all members of society. Popularly called Bughouse Square, the park was the center of Bohemian life in Chicago for decades to follow. Today, it continues to be used for public debates and rallies. Washington Square's period of significance thus spans from 1842 when it was initially created, to 1940, the end of the fifty year cut-off as established by the National Register.

It has been noted that the real estate speculators who created Washington Square may have named it after "a similar square in Manhattan which, after its construction in the 1820s, sparked the rapid development of the surrounding streets with fine rowhouses" [Pomaran, 1987, p. 1]. The terms of the land donation for Chicago's Washington Square specified that the park was to be fenced and landscaped. However, it was left largely unimproved through the 1860s. In spite of this, elegant homes and churches began developing around the Square. Among them was a frame Italianate house built by Mahlon D. Ogden, brother of Chicago's first mayor, William B. Ogden [ibid]. Churches were also erected in the immediate vicinity. It is

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Washington Square

believed that the dedication of Unity Church in 1869 finally prompted the City to improve the park. Though minimal, the improvements included borders of limestone coping, diagonal walks, and a fence around the park.

Early in its history, Washington Square gained its importance as a place of public expression. While the neighborhood surrounding the park was becoming populated by well-to-do American-born Protestants of English descent, German immigrants were moving nearby. Cultural differences spurred a new ordinance in the 1850s which raised liquor license fees, and placed restrictions on beer gardens to dissuade the drinking of alcohol on Sundays. This led to the "Lager Beer Riot" of April 21, 1855, in which angry Germans stormed Washington Square to protest the Common Council's actions. "The Germans finally triumphed, and their beer gardens remained an important part of Chicago neighborhood life until Prohibition in 1920" [Pacyga and Skerrett, 1986, p. 70].

The Chicago Fire of 1871 destroyed many of the homes in the area as well as the wooden portions of the Unity Church. Washington Square served to break the flames, saving some of the immediate surrounding houses, including the Ogden mansion [Pomaranc, 1987, p. 1]. During the post-fire period, the area continued to develop as a fashionable neighborhood. While residences still predominated, additional churches and some schools and club buildings were also built in the district. In 1892, Mrs. Walter Loomis Newberry founded a private research library in honor of her husband, which replaced the Ogden mansion.

By the 1890s, a Victorian fountain was placed in the center of Washington Square, and the park was considered a Chicago attraction. In fact, Rand McNally & Co. included a perspective drawing of the Square in the Bird's-Eye Views and Guide to Chicago, which was published in 1893, the same year that tourists were coming in droves to attend the World's Columbian Exposition. During the late 1890s, the park was also gaining popularity with local residents. George Ade wrote about Washington Square for his Chicago Record column, "Stories of the Streets and of the Town." The article was accompanied by a sketch by famous Chicago illustrator and cartoonist John T. McCutcheon. Ade asserted that to many people Washington Square was "the most picturesque bit in all the great division (north side)" [Ade, 1963, p. 84].

Sometime around the turn-of-the-century, the Square "had been allowed to run down at the heel," and its fountain had been removed [Chicago Tribune, September 7, 1906]. In 1906, when Alderman

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McCormick of the 21st Ward became President of the Drainage Board, he decided to donate his alderman's salary to a civic improvement. McCormick determined that the \$600 should be spent on a fountain to be placed in the center of Washington Square. The fountain was to be "an artistic one which will ornament the park as well as quench the thirst of visitors" [Inter-Ocean, March 21, 1906]. The following year, the fountain was placed in the park. At that time, the City followed suit by spending an additional \$10,000 on new sidewalks and landscape gardening [Chicago Tribune, September 7, 1906].

By the 1910s and early 1920s, the surrounding neighborhood was becoming more diverse. "The Gold Coast became the place to live in the city and the old stately mansions were turned into rooming houses. The Washington Square neighborhood became the 'Montmartre' of Chicago as the 'Bohemians' moved in" [Mitchell, 1987, p. 6]. As flophouses became increasingly prevalent in the area, which was still bordered by fashionable neighborhoods, Washington Square gained its famous nickname of Bughouse Square. In his classic sociological study entitled The Gold Coast and the Slum, Harvey W. Zorbaugh asserts that because of the fifty or more lodging houses in the neighborhood, Washington Square was "the congregating place of the hobo intellectual" [1929, p. 106].

By 1917, the new, less privileged residents in the neighborhood began lecturing, protesting, reciting poetry, and loudly pontificating in Washington Square. A Chicago Daily News article of 1919 referred to the people who frequented the Square as "the poor homeless nuts" who:

"...lived with the squirrels in the park. On warm summer Sunday afternoons they ,came forth in droves. One by one they climbed upon soap boxes and talked to the sad eyed loafers gathered about" [Anderson, 1919].

Inspired by these gatherings, a man named Jack Jones formed the "Dill Pickle Club." A forum for free expression, the club soon became active enough that its members needed an indoor facility. They rented a room near the park on Tooker Alley. In order to enter one had to climb through a hole in the wall at a building on State Street.

Many of the impassioned soap box orators made political commentary. According to Zorbaugh:



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Washington Square

"Because Chicago is America's "wobbly" capital there is an unusually large element of intellectuals and agitators, of I.W.W. sympathizers and "reds," and of professional malcontents in its population of drifting men.... Their favorite place for setting up their soap boxes is in Washington Square, between Clark and Dearborn streets, in front of the Newberry Library" [1929, pp.114-15].

However, like Speakers Corner in London's Hyde Park, the platform was open to all. It attracted "...evangelists, suffragists, ...poets, philosophers, tale tellers or anyone else who wished to mount a makeshift podium" [Chicago Daily News, June 15, 1972]. The forum was so well orchestrated that for many years a "king" was appointed. It was understood that a 50-foot buffer would be respected by the other speakers around the "king's platform," positioned at the north end of the Square [Mitchell, 1987, p. 7].

By the 1930s, Bughouse Square had such a reputation that tour buses included it on their routes of "big-city" attractions. "No sight-seeing bus line excluded it from its points of interest list and it never failed to thrill the visitors" [North Loop News, May 27, 1937]. In spite of its popularity for tourists, and gold coasters who went "slumming" there, the American Legion wanted the park "cleaned" of its undesirables in the 1930s. Washington Square was portrayed as the scene of "hold-ups and assaults, ... a rendezvous for the undesirables, ...ex-convicts,... moral perverts and like violators of the law" [North Loop News, April 8, 1937].

Washington Square has hosted many famous speakers. Among them were Clarence Darrow, Carl Sandburg, Ben Hecht, Mayor (Big Bill) Thompson, Emma Goldman, and Eugene Debs. After World War II, the soap boxes became less prevalent. In 1959, the ownership of Washington Square was transferred to the Chicago Park District.

By the 1970s the surrounding area had changed dramatically. Many of the nearby historic structures were demolished, and parking lots and high rises began to appear throughout the neighborhood. During this period, the Park District remodeled Washington Square, paying little respect to its important history. In spite of its changes, Washington Square retains its character-defining features as well as original fabric such as the stone coping. In addition, it continues to be used as a forum of free speech, at least annually, as the Newberry Library holds a debate in the park each year.

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Washington Square

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Ironically, today the park attracts surrounding development, as was historically intended. However, the increased heights and density of modern high rises threaten to cast the park almost entirely in shadow. Fortunately, Washington Square is now part of a Chicago Historic Landmark District. In addition, the Chicago Park District and the Washington Square Association are embarking upon a fund-raising campaign to restore the park. As one of the earliest and most colorful of Chicago's historic parks, Washington Square is worthy of protection for the next generation of soap box speakers.

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Newspapers

Anderson, Sherwood. "Jack Jones--'The Pickler.'" Chicago Daily News, June 18, 1919.

Chicago Daily News, June 15, 1972.

"Gives Fountain to City." Chicago Inter Ocean, March 21, 1906.

"Keep Washington Square Clean Is Plea of Legion." North Loop News, April 8, 1937.

"Save Park for Women, Children, Plea of Citizens." North Loop News, May 27, 1937.

"Plan is to expend \$250,000 to Beautify Small Parks: Washington Square and East End Plot Are to Be Especially Favored, According to the Commission's Plans." Chicago Tribune, September 7, 1906.

Articles

Mitchell, Cindy. "Bughouse Square, Chicago's Oldest Park." Friends of the Park Newsletter, Fall 1987, pp. 6-7.

Documents

Pomaranc, Joan.C. "Preliminary Staff Summary of Information for the Designation of Washington Square District." Chicago: Commission on Chicago Landmarks, 1987.

Some of the research for this nomination was conducted by Cindy Mitchell, Friends of the Parks, and Joan C. Pomaranc, Commission on Chicago Landmarks. Assistance with its preparation was provided by Bart H. Ryckbosch and Robert Blythe of the Chicago Park District, Office of Research and Planning.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Books

Ade, George. Chicago Stories. Chicago: Henry Regnery, reprint, 1963.

Bird's-Eye Views and Guide to Chicago. Chicago: Rand, McNally & Co., 1893.

Pacyga, Dominic, and Skerrett, Ellen. Chicago: City of Neighborhoods Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1986.

Zorbaugh, Harvey W. The Gold Coast and the Slum. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1929.

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: \_\_\_\_\_

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property 3 acres

UTM References

A 16 447640 4638700  
 Zone Easting Northing

C 16 447750 4638510

B 16 447750 4638700  
 Zone Easting Northing

D 16 447640 4638510

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The property is bounded by the north curb-line of W. Delaware Pl., the south curb-line of W. Walton St., the west curb-line of N. Dearborn St., and the east curb-line of N. Clark St.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

This is the plot of land historically associated with the park.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Julia Sniderman, Preservation Planning Supervisor and William Tippens, Arch. Historian

organization Chicago Park District date December 3, 1990

street & number 425 E. McPetridge, #3C telephone (312) 294-2226

city or town Chicago state Illinois zip code 60605

The following proposals are being referred to the sub-committee for their  
advice. The committee will report to the sub-committee on or about  
the 15th day of the month of the year 1954.

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**Proposal 1**  
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**Proposal 2**  
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**Proposal 3**  
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**Proposal 4**  
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**Proposal 5**  
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the 15th day of the month of the year 1954.

**Proposal 6**  
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the 15th day of the month of the year 1954.

**Proposal 7**  
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the 15th day of the month of the year 1954.

The following proposals have been referred to the sub-committee for their  
advice. The committee will report to the sub-committee on or about  
the 15th day of the month of the year 1954.

**Proposal 8**  
The following proposals are being referred to the sub-committee for their  
advice. The committee will report to the sub-committee on or about  
the 15th day of the month of the year 1954.